

SWEARING-IN CEREMONY FOR AMBASSADOR GEOFFREY PYATT
JULY 30, 2013

DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE WILLIAM J. BURNS

Good morning and welcome. It's an honor for me to swear-in a truly extraordinary colleague, Geoff Pyatt, as the next U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine.

I am also pleased to welcome Ukraine's Ambassador to the United States, Ambassador Motsyk, and our friends from the diplomatic community who join us today to honor Geoff. And I am especially pleased to welcome members of Geoff's large cheering section – none more distinguished than his parents, Mary and Bud, his wife Mary, daughter Claire, and son William.

We are sending to Ukraine one of the finest American diplomats with whom I have ever worked. Geoff Pyatt has served across the globe, from Central America to South Asia, and East Asia to Europe. He has also served with distinction in what my friend Ryan Crocker calls the hardest of hardship posts – Washington, DC – including in his current role as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs. Geoff is a role model for Foreign Service Officers of all generations -- he is as smart and professionally-skilled, as he is decent and caring.

Geoff is also an exceptionally gifted strategic thinker. It is no exaggeration to say that the continuing transformation of our relationship with India in recent years would not have succeeded without Geoff's vision, creativity, and tireless dedication. Colin Powell likes to say that “perpetual optimism is a force multiplier” – and Geoff has demonstrated the wisdom of Secretary Powell's insight on every issue that he has touched, but none more vividly than the U.S.-Indian partnership.

For Geoff, being a diplomat is not merely a job, it is a calling. No paper or study goes unread or unanalyzed. No opportunity to listen or learn is missed. And nothing – not even a broken hand – will stop Geoff from writing his legendary cables and memos.

Anyone who has worked with and for Geoff praises his leadership skills. He is a renowned mentor with a keen eye for talent – Geoff Pyatt's Rules for aspiring reporting officers serve as gospel for the dozens and dozens of junior officers who have learned from Geoff's example and patient leadership.

When a tsunami struck southern India in 2004 killing 10,000 people, Geoff was Chargé in New Delhi. He made sure all American citizens were accounted for, broke through the bureaucracy to allow us to be the first country to provide humanitarian assistance, and facilitated the first ever joint task force with Indian military liaison officers to coordinate relief efforts. For his initiative, intellectual courage, and leadership, Geoff received the American Foreign Service Association's Rivkin award.

Ambassador Motsyk, I want to assure you that in naming Geoff Pyatt as our next Ambassador to Ukraine, we are sending you our very best. In fact, I can think of no one better to represent American interests in Kyiv. Geoff brings a depth and breadth of knowledge and experience that will undoubtedly strengthen our strategic partnership – from non-proliferation and energy security, to advancing democracy and increasing the ties between our people.

As Geoff noted in his confirmation testimony, the U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership “set high expectations” for our bilateral relationship. And during this pivotal moment for Ukraine, we will continue to strongly support the Ukrainian people as they work to realize their aspiration for European integration.

Geoff, you embark on this assignment with the full trust and confidence of President Obama and Secretary Kerry. And you leave on this latest adventure in a wonderful diplomatic career with the enormous respect and admiration of all of us in this room today, and of everyone you've touched over the years with your skill and decency. Congratulations!

AMBASSADOR PYATT

Thank you Mr. Deputy Secretary -- for doing me the honor of officiating today and for your support and encouragement -- and that of the Department's senior leadership -- as I've prepared for this extraordinary responsibility.

Thank you also to Ambassador Motsyk for joining today and to all of our friends and colleagues including other members of the Washington diplomatic corps who have come out to share this occasion with us.

Over the years I've found that the key to these swearing in remarks is to make them short and sincere -- and I'll aim for both today. But I hope you'll bear with me for at least a minute for a brief story that involves the Deputy Secretary.

As I was thinking about today's event I realized I could recall vividly the first time I spoke to Bill Burns -- it would have been in the mid-1990's when I was lucky to be part of the extraordinary team that worked on the personal staff of Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott, and Ambassador Burns was Political Minister Counselor in Moscow.

Back in that pre-blackberry era, part of the job of the D staff duty officer was to come into the office on Saturdays, and one of those weekends, I needed to call Bill Burns in Moscow to sort out an issue related to one of Strobe's Russia trips. Even in those days, I should add, those of us working among the State Department's 7th floor staff spoke Bill Burns' name in [hallowed](#) tones, knowing there was greatness ahead of him.

As with most events that far back in my career, I can recall little of the substance, but I remember the people involved as if it was yesterday. I relate all this because for me it goes to the essence of our diplomatic profession -- we focus on policy, but the instrument of our work is people.

From this perspective I'm especially grateful that so many *people* who've played critical roles in my Foreign Service career have been able to join today for this swearing in.

I'll start of course with Mary, William and Claire. Across 24 years with the State Department and more transits of the Frankfurt airport than any of us would care to remember, they've handled everything the Foreign Service can throw at them without breaking a sweat. I'm enormously proud of all of them.

I'd also like to express my gratitude to the many former bosses who are here today and have helped to mentor and inspire me along the way. I won't name them all for fear of overlooking someone, but I wouldn't be standing before you today without the patient guidance of some of our greatest Foreign Service Officers.

I also need to acknowledge my contemporary colleagues -- both the superb SCA team led by Assistant Secretary Blake and the EUR team represented today by Acting Assistant Secretary Paul Jones.

From the former I owe a particular note of appreciation to the front office support team -- especially Rose Naputi, Gina Cooper, Deborah Watson, Opal Blackmon, Chaz Martin and most of all Katherine McGifford, who has been a friend and a bureaucratic protector for nearly a decade.

On the EUR side let me say how pleased I am at the reorganization that will give me the chance again to work closely with Eric Rubin, our new Ukraine DAS, as well as express thanks to the entire UMB team -- both the outgoing crew ably led by Craig Conway as well as new desk officers Teresa Grantham and Joanna Pritchett and our superb Post Management Officer Sharon Russell-Nordberg.

I should also say a word of thanks to the many friends here today from my life around the IAEA and my work on issues of nuclear energy and non-proliferation. As the home of Chernobyl and a country which 22 years ago inherited and then relinquished the world's third largest nuclear weapons arsenal, Ukraine occupies a particularly important niche on these issues, and I'll be pleased to continue partnerships with DoE, NNSA, the NRC and the State Department's T family.

Finally, a word to my Ukrainian and Ukrainian-American colleagues. To Ambassador Motsyk and my patient FSI language teachers Olena and Carl – Дякую for the incredibly warm introduction to Ukrainian culture and your encouragement and instruction as I begin to think through my priorities for Kyiv.

And to my many friends from the Ukrainian-American community -- both old and new -- thank you for your support and advice as we seek to advance Ukraine's aspiration to become a modern, democratic and prosperous European state.

I'll take with me to Kyiv a passionate commitment to building the Strategic Partnership in which multiple U.S. Administrations have invested, and the wisdom derived from a uniquely talented group of predecessors -- all of whom have lent their advice and several of whom have done me the honor of joining here today.

I hope I can lean on all of you in the months ahead, and also look forward to working closely with the exceptional group of senior U.S. officials from across the interagency community who lead our Strategic Partnership Commission working groups.

The point I made a minute ago about the centrality of people in the craft of diplomacy applies in particular to the people of Ukraine -- who have so many important decisions ahead of them in this year of the Villnius Summit. It will be my highest priority to support the Ukrainian peoples' European choice.

I'm particularly honored to be heading to Kyiv at such a consequential moment in Ukraine's history, and come at this new responsibility convinced of Ukraine's geostrategic importance and impressed by the country's still untapped potential. There are big challenges ahead, but I thank everyone here for their support and encouragement as Mary and I embark on this next exciting phase of our Foreign Service journey.